

Good morning, Chairwoman Stillman, Chairman Dargan and Distinguished Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee.

My name is Steven Rief, and I am President of the Connecticut State Police Union.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today. I am here to speak in **FAVOR** of:

PROPOSED BILL NO. 908

***AN ACT CONCERNING OFFENSES AGAINST POLICE CANINES AND
VOLUNTEER CANINE SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAMS***

I would like to start my testimony by stating that I am a Connecticut State Trooper. I have served the state in this capacity for nearly 20 years. As Union President I represent approximately 1160 State Troopers, Sergeants and Master Sergeants.

The Connecticut State Police has a Canine Unit as part of the department's Emergency Services Unit. This Canine Unit is responsible for training and certifying a number of canine teams, comprising of a police officer/handler and the canine, in their law enforcement responsibilities. The State Police Canine Unit oversees 79 State Police Canines, to include patrol dogs and a number of highly trained specialty dogs for search and rescue, bloodhound, accelerant/arson, narcotics, and explosive/bombs for detection, location and interdiction. Some of these canines are cross trained. Additionally, the State Police Canine Unit is responsible for training and certification of 127 Connecticut Municipal Police Canines and out of state law enforcement canines. There is a significant amount of time and resources invested and used in the training and certification of the canines and their handlers.

Our canine teams are assigned with a number of challenging, difficult and often dangerous tasks as required in their law enforcement and search and rescue roles. These dangers are inherent with the profession. The legislation proposed in this bill will rightly address the importance of protecting and maintaining police canine teams while performing their mission critical responsibilities. Additionally, this bill will extend to police canines similar protections in law which are already provided for by statute to law enforcement officers in Connecticut. Equal protections from harassing, baiting, tormenting, striking, fighting, choking or assaulting police canines, and other similar service canines, while in the performance of their duties should be extended to these canines. I respectfully urge this committee to pass this needed legislation.

I would like to close by thanking this committee for your attention to this important issue and I would be happy to answer questions and provide you with any further information.

February 24, 2009

CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE UNION
Steven Rief, President